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Manifest, Hidden, and Divine: Introduction to Sefirot Aikido

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The potential for forging a valuable relationship between two transpersonal systems, Aikido, a Japanese martial art and spiritual tradition, and Kabbalah, a Jewish spiritual tradition, is explored. Aikido is not simply a martial art, rather it is also a way to achieve a sense of the spiritual. However, especially for Westerners, many of its spiritual tenets are elusive, based on abstruse Japanese cultural roots, whereas Kabbalah, as a spiritual tradition more fully explicated for Western audiences, can provide an accessible framework for grasping some of Aikido's deeper meanings. A blend of these traditions, called Sefirot Aikido, uses Kabbalah to understand, as well as to augment the practice of, Aikido.

There is an expanding need for developing spiritual understandings in regards to the growing threats, stresses, and dangers of modern life. The practice of Aikido, a Japanese martial art, offers an avenue for bringing the spiritual into greater harmony in these trying times and, perhaps, even offers the possibilities for some to achieve transcendence. However, for Westerners, many of the mystical tenets and practices of Aikido, based on its Japanese cultural roots, can be abstruse. In accord with the writings of others advocating making Aikido more culturally relevant in a Western context (e.g., Friedman, 2005), Kabbalah, as a Jewish spiritual tradition, can offer a prism through which Aikido may be better understood. Forging a relationship between these two transpersonal systems may provide a more accessible framework for approaching the deeper teachings within Aikido. Specifically, using Kabbalah to explicate Aikido, as well as to augment its practice, may assist its Western students to more deeply understand and manifest its esoteric meaning. *Sefirot Aikido* is introduced as one such approach.

Aikido and Kabbalah

Aikido practice retains a strong sense of its martial arts roots, but it is something more (Stein, 2002). The dojo or Aikido practice hall exists between the sacred and the profane; the dojo in Aikido is a threshold, a gate. Thresholds are often found by accident; they are places where strange events take place and where we learn things that cannot be discovered in any other way. In the narrow confines of a threshold we may find fantasy, memory, dream, anxiety, miracle, intuition, and magic. These are the means by which the deep soul prospers. It is a place where we move from what is to what will be, a place where we can continue our search for wholeness and meaning. To what does the gate lead, if we find the door and enter through it? It may lead

to a new way of understanding and experiencing ourselves, our new self-image, our purposes in life and the means of attaining these purposes, as well as a new image of the nature of the worlds we live in, how they influence us, and how we may influence them (Segal, 2000, p. 81; Scholem, 1965, p. 76). This is, of course, a hero's quest, the hero within ourselves; heroes do come with the most unexpected of faces.

To more fully explore the nature of Aikido and its thresholds, gates, and meanings, it is important to look more closely at *kotodama*, a mystical school of Shintoism with elements of Buddhism. Morihei Ueshiba, Aikido's founder, linked *kotodama* to Aikido inexorably into a system that we now refer to as traditional Aikido. It would be hard to imagine Aikido as we know it today without the foundations that Morihei gave to it. However, we cannot get inside of Morihei's head. The episodic and fragmentary knowledge that various people have of Morihei's "inside view" of *kotodama* Aikido, his imaginative, emotional, as well as rational notions, cannot provide the guidance we need for our quest. Morihei's mysticism was unique. But at the same time it has much in common with other mystical traditions. Our knowledge of *kotodama* is, as a result, quite limited; it is obscure even in contemporary Japan. We hardly know how ignorant we are and what are the missing pieces of the puzzle that is *kotodama*, although Gleason (1995) has shed some light on this matter. It seems quite unlikely that we can develop the requisite understanding, yet *kotodama* was a context for Aikido, but one whose intricacies, especially Morihei's interpretations, are lost. Context makes it possible for people of varying backgrounds to work together and together transform a fundamentally anti-social activity into a harmonious wholesome and positive experience. In what follows, to explicate what we know of *kotodama* Aikido, it is compared to Kabbalah and, in the

process, our ignorance of the former can possibly be diminished with what we understand of the latter: Kabbalah provides insights for understanding Aikido.

The intention is to show that Kabbalah is a fruitful and practical system that can be used to replace kotodama as a useful context for grasping Aikido's deeper meaning. What Kabbalah and Morihei's Aikido have in common, ultimately, is not a program for correcting weakness so much as a process for growth, transformation, and competency. Also, Kabbalah has always happened in a small circle of initiates gathered around a master. Aikido too has developed in small groups who are initiated by a *sensei*. Furthermore, the spirit of the times favors internationalism, the further merging of east and west. Aikido is culturally insensitive to many aspects of American society and the Western world—and looking at it from the perspective of Kabbalah that grew and was shaped in the Western heartland may begin to redress this matter. At the same time, Kabbalah can learn much from Aikido. It is the nature of human beings to learn, as Japanese learned from India and China, Romans learned from Greeks, and Christians learned from Romans, Greeks, and Jews.

Kabbalah refers to systems of occult theosophy or mystical interpretation of the Hebrew Bible developed orally by some rabbis in perhaps the second to fifth centuries and edited and put into manuscript form beginning in about the tenth century; it was also transmitted to and taken up by medieval Christians. The translation of Judaic into Christian Kabbalah was not a difficult process. Jesus, St. Paul, and some other early Christians were believed to have studied the esoteric knowledge and much of what they said has been attributed to very early Kabbalistic sources (Dan, 1977). Conversely, some Kabbalists have borrowed from non-Jewish sources.

The Bible may be approached in at least four ways. It may be seen as a literal history, as an allegory, as a system of abstract ideas, or as a compendium of mystical knowledge. The latter is the Kabbalah's approach.

Morihei Ueshiba, it seems, approached some of the ancient Japanese literature in these terms as well. However, as far as we know he did not set out in detail a methodology regarding union with what he sometimes called the Ultimate One, or show how to apply what he learned there, outside of what he said about Aikido. This knowledge does not appear to be available today, either directly or indirectly, through Morihei's writings. Kabbalah provides us with the symbols, knowledge, and methods of a spiritual quest and how to apply them. Perhaps a synthesis between Aikido and Kabbalah could augment our understanding of Aikido and also provide new ways of seeing Kabbalah?

With a handshake between Aikido and Kabbalah, we can explore two significant matters: add to our understand-

ing of Aikido through Kabbalah and approach Kabbalah through Aikido (Kohn, 2002, pp. 53-56). Some important connections and correspondences between kotodama and Kabbalah theory and practices, from various sources, can be established. Both systems can benefit from the comparison and the student of Aikido may find the mystical door and how it can be opened perhaps better explained through Kabbalah than through Aikido's original mystical grounding.

Via Mystica: The Meaning of Rituals and Practices

Preparation for the journey to thresholds and for mystical contact or union with God is realized for the most part through ritual activity. Rituals involve prescribed activities and a context that provides a framework for understanding and interpreting the actions. Gill (1987), in his work on Navajo religion, analyzed the structure of Navajo prayer. He noted that, in the Navajo view, prayers are not texts; they are always acts that are performed for someone for some felt need. Such rituals often involve a large component of magical practices and such tendencies also exist in both Aikido and Kabbalah. Tambiah (1985) defined ritual as performance and his definition of ritual delineated several levels of performance that could apply to the practice of Aikido. Idel (2002, pp. 34-37, 289-293) suggests similar elements in some Kabbalah.

Morihei apparently viewed Aikido itself as ritual leading toward the mystical path to enlightenment. "It is not possible," he wrote, "for anyone to speak of such things in their entirety—just head for the light and heat, learn from the gods, and through the virtue of devoted practice become one with the divine. Seek enlightenment along this edge" (1991, p. 32). The techniques of Aikido are martial techniques, but they are also seemingly ritual performances and were originally developed to express kotodama principles by realizing in physical movement the ordered natural law of the so-called fifty rhythms of the universe. Every principle and technique has a kotodama, a sacred vibration that contains its essence. If one understands the significance of the kotodama, one can grasp its function (e.g., water) and merge with its spirit (e.g., fire). Among other practices, proper recitation of the verses of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* would have enabled one to grasp these texts' magical properties. In addition, a special state of mind must be developed. If Aikido is ritual activity, then the dojo may be seen as a threshold to the unity and transcendence with the Godhead.

One of Morihei's *doka* (sayings of the Way) expresses this (Stevens, 1987), as follows:

If you do not blend
with the emptiness of
the Pure Void,
you will never know

the Path of Aiki. (p. 106)

Ritual, then, takes God into human action, for ritual action is related to the realm of divine action; unity achieves its symbolic expression in ritual. Aikido practice is a way of finding the sacred in the mundane. But there is more. There is a magical aspect to ritual as well. This ritual nature of Aikido was apparent to Morihei. In another doka, he put it this way (Stevens, 1987):

Rely on Aiki
to activate your
manifold powers;
pacify all things and
create a beautiful world. (p. 108)

In an influential Kabbalistic theory based on the teachings of Isaac Luria, mystical union is described as the reconstruction of a broken unity; the reintegration of the human into the primordial unity, whose other half is the Divine. A person finds his or her self by losing the self in God. The Kabbalistic Tree of Life (discussed later) is a basis for many rituals whose aim is this unity. Human beings are but half of a greater unity and, by their actions, they can reconstruct it. In the "Symposium" dialogues, Plato described the division of the primeval androgynous spherical being into two halves, male and female. The earthly intercourse between male and female, who derive their souls from an original unity, is also conducive to the attainment of harmony on high. This feeling, or something close to it, occurs on occasion after Aikido practice; a feeling that everything went well, everything flowed. This is also a feeling of great joy, some people experience ecstasy. It is a marker of a unity.

Morihei expressed the matter in another doka (Stevens, 1987):

You cannot see or touch the Divine with your gross senses. The Divine is within you, not somewhere else. Unite yourself to the Divine, and you will be able to perceive kami wherever you are, but do not try to grasp or cling to them. (p. 108)

Morihei believed himself to be a protagonist at the center of a great cosmic drama. Kabbalah clarifies and focuses on this drama as well, in which human beings have a central role and urgent responsibility to purify themselves and also mend a ruptured divinity. Morihei referred to Aikido practice in this way: "Aikido is *misogi*, purification of mind and body, a Way to reform and transform the world" (Stevens, 1987, p. 106). Aikido is embedded in a highly complex ritual culture; Kabbalists have often alluded to rituals and disciplines but they are seldom spelled out or analyzed in their writings. Idel (1988b) has provided some details of the ecstatic or prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, a 13th

century Spanish Kabbalist. Fine (2003) has provided a somewhat more detailed view of rituals and practices among the circle of Lurianic Kabbalists in 16th century Israel. For many Kabbalists, their bodies served as instruments for performing the work of purification and restoration that had to be done. The body was also seen as an obstacle on the path to spiritual restitution. Many newcomers seeking to make progress in Aikido find their body gets in the way of their desire and effort to perform the techniques or rituals demonstrated in practice sessions.

Aikido techniques are practiced, at one level, because they are symbolic of basic forces of the universe. But they are also practiced in order to have an impact on the student, the world, and the universe. The separate spheres of the abstract and the concrete come together in the dojo and provide a key to the doors. The threshold leads to an augmented understanding of Aikido and Kabbalah, and for some, much more.

These complexities may have a basis in human nature. Writing about brain science and the biology of belief, Newberg and d'Aquili note "that the root of the ceremonial rites of all human societies, from the most primitive to the most exalted, are an elaboration of the neurobiological need of all living things to escape the limiting boundaries of the self" (2001, p. 85; see also Torrence, 1994).

Mysticism East and West

Robert Bellah (1985), in his study of Japanese religions, notes that traditionalistic religious action of a generally magical type has remained important throughout Japanese history, despite the dominance of rationalistic religious thought. There seems to be two basic conceptions of the divine in Japanese religion. The first is that of a supernatural entity who dispenses nurturance, care, and love. Examples include the Confucian Heaven and Earth, Amida and other Buddhas, the Shinto deities, as well as local tutelary deities and ancestors. This category shades off imperceptible into political superiors and parents; both of who are treated as in part, at least, sacred.

The second basic conception of the divine is more difficult to explain. Bellah describes it as the ground of being or the inner existence of reality. Examples are the Chinese *Tao*, the neo-Confucian *li*, often translated as reason, and *hsin*, heart or mind, (when identified with *li*); the Buddhist concept of the Buddha-nature; and the Shinto term *kami* (in its most philosophical interpretation). Religious action toward these entities is the attempt on the part of the communicant to attain some form of union or identity with this ground of being or essence of reality.

Apparently seeking a place where he could understand and develop his ideas and his feelings, Morihei was drawn to a sect and its leader who was a mystic. The sect was devot-

ed to reforming the world and creating heaven on earth; over time Morihei adopted and adapted this role and outlook as his own. The mystic Onisaburo Deguchi and the sect he led, *Omoto Kyo* ("Great Foundation" or "Great Source" religion), had a great impact on Morihei. Onisaburo also had an enormous impact on the sect whose leadership he took over when the prophetess Nao Deguchi died. Omoto was one of the "newly arisen religions" (*shinko shukyo*) that periodically appear in Japan, popular religions based on revelations of shamanistic leaders. Under Onisaburo, Omoto aligned itself with the mystical traditions of the Ancient Learning School which were incorporated into Omoto mythology; a blend of Shintoist ideas with some elements of Buddhism. Using *kotodama-gaku* (sound-science theory), Onisaburo reinterpreted Nao's ideas. He provided Omoto with an interpretation of the ancient learning that indicated that evil, chaos, and disorder exist in the world as a reflection of that which exists in the kami world of hidden and concealed matters. This could be found in such works as the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) and *Nihon shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan); thus Onisaburo used the language and concepts of Shinto (The Way of the Gods), but gave them a decidedly unique interpretation. The mission of Omoto's followers was to help unite the earthly matters with concealed things, thereby making heaven visible. Various Omoto rituals that Morihei incorporated into Aikido were performed to accomplish these goals. In some Kabbalah, these matters are related to *tikkun*, which will be discussed below.

Although the social philosophy and activities of Omoto changed over time (it was at one time extremely nationalistic and what could be called a "fundamentalist" movement), in the pre-World War II period its social doctrine called for renovation and restoration of a just order and destruction of all evil. This led the kyo to condemn war and stress the necessity for developing an international cooperative spirit among the nations of the world. Through Onisaburo's interpretation of the ancient texts, Omoto doctrine challenged the existing socio-religious order that was based on state Shinto and emperor worship. Eventually the government prosecuted Omoto by charging Onisaburo and others in the leadership with offenses against the Newspaper Laws (Nadolski, 1975). The government alleged that Omoto doctrine as presented in the press was critical of the emperor's views, blasphemed the emperor's authority, ignored the emperor's sovereign rights, among other charges.

The mystics who created Kabbalah (tradition, "that which is received," i.e., to receive cosmic truths) did not directly challenge institutional Jewish religion, as Onisaburo and perhaps Morihei had done with regard to state Shinto—rather, they used the language of the tradition to

explain their ideas. At the same time they presented a fairly coherent set of esoteric ideas that in some respects undermined the framework of traditional Judaism (Scholem, 1969). Institutionally the Jewish religion in the 12th and 13th centuries was working out a rational and Aristotelian rationalistic explanation of the ideas, philosophy, and practices that make up the tradition. The books of the Kabbalists, the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Book of Splendor), the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Formation), the *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Book of Brightness) and other less known works, may be seen as the equivalent of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*. The mystical doctrine of Kabbalah points the way to overcoming the feeling of having lost our way, of flailing around with a faulty blueprint for life, as well as the feeling of personal isolation. At the same time it shows us how we can help to heal, repair, and rebalance the universe as a whole (known as "tikkun"). The ultimate goal for the student of Kabbalah is personal spiritual growth, seen as a loss of ego that allows one to experience closeness to God and the ecstatic experiences this entails. Through various rituals and methodologies leading to transcendence, the student is able to perceive and to understand the mysterious working of the Divinity and to use this experience and knowledge to help set things right, in a personal sense and in a larger sense. The student must also learn to deal with and help to eliminate those factors that disturb the right order of things—the "other side," the demonic or Satanic, terms used by Kabbalists to refer to evil (Scholem, 1969); this responsibility has both a personal, social, and cosmic foci; the latter is known as the Great Tikkun. The mythical imagination of Kabbalah pulls us out into the world and summons us to tikkun, and in this way serves as a counterweight to the self-absorption created by the martial focus of Aikido practice. One of the finest expressions of this duty is Aiki Extensions, created by practitioners at the University of Chicago and now a world-wide organization.

Aikido practice techniques, so-called "breathing exercises," such as *funatori furutama*, *amano torifune*, and *shinkon*, were taken from his Omoto studies by Morihei (Kaku, 2000; Saotome, 1993). Similarly, these breathing and "warm-up" exercises can be connected to and build upon Kabbalah. This can be done as follows: substituting the Sefirot names for the commonly used numerical counting in English or Japanese when performing the warm-ups. Surely Morihei did not simply count as he repetitively moved his body, inhaling and exhaling. Similarly some Kabbalists use a ritual that involves pronouncing and combining the names and letters of the Sefirot, as well as other esoteric names and formulae, to draw down "the supernal power so as to unite with it" (Idel, 1988, pp. 168-170.). Photographs of Morihei show him seated in a posture used by holy men, performing *kishon no bo* and *chinkon no bo*,

“bringing a spirit into oneself” and “calming one’s soul” respectively (Kaku, 2000, p. 79).

Language and Mysticism

With regard to *kotodama gaku* (the Science of Sound Spirit), Stevens (1987) indicates that Morihei’s own explanations were maddeningly abstruse. He rambled from one subject to another, rattling off the names of obscure Shinto deities, stringing together combinations of baffling terms, and offering idiosyncratic interpretations of Japanese history, interspersed with apparently totally irrelevant reminiscences of past events. His talks were such a confused jumble that it had been suggested that Morihei was, on those occasions, speaking in tongues, possessed by one kami or another. Most of his ideas were derived from the impossibly complex Omoto Kyo doctrine and his reading of Japan’s oldest chronicles. Similarly, people often find that the fundamental views of Kabbalistic theory are set forth in a form that is often paradoxical, usually unintelligible, and always surprising.

Both the Kabbalah, as well as Morihei’s explanations of kotodama, use traditional language in ways that is sometimes obscure and occasionally idiosyncratic to convey teachings and meanings. To explain themselves and their experiences to others, the mystic must use the symbols and language of their tradition in order to be understood at all. But because their experience is essentially ineffable, the symbols and language cannot fully capture the experiences. This language often needs to be stretched and transformed in the process of communicating the experience. Mystics find that they cannot explain or communicate their experiences, the thresholds and gates they have crossed, to others because the experience is too personal. The hidden world is a labyrinth and ordinary language is often as much of a hindrance as a help in understanding the science of the invisible.

Mysticism, generally speaking, has striven to detect successively newer and deeper layers in the mystery of the Godhead. In Kabbalah a starting point for this effort is the notion of the Sefirot, which for some has come to signify the emergence of divine powers and essence of God. The hidden Being is active throughout the universe and in this sense has certain attributes that in turn represent certain systemic aspects of the divine nature, perhaps even stages of the divine Being and its hidden life. These attributes are not meant to be merely metaphoric: they represent a higher reality. There are ten fundamental attributes of God, which are at the same time ten powers that interact with each other and through which the divine life pulsates and influences all. The emanation of the Sefirot is conceived as a process that takes place in God and at the same time enables men and women to perceive God in so far as God emerges from the hidden abode.

Philosophy of Origins

According to some Kabbalists, *Ein-Sof* (the hidden God) retreated from the arena of the universe, contracted into Itself, and left behind It, in that space which had been defined as It, an emptiness. It was by the contraction of Ein-Sof from infinite space into an infinitesimal monad of pure energy that the worlds come into being. If the Ein-Sof had not retreated into Itself there would have been no space for the activity of Genesis to take place. The world comes into being only after this contraction. It was then that the Ein-Sof sent forth beams of energy and information, an emanation of Itself, into the space created by the contraction. On the surface of that space the first sparks were struck, the pinpoints of light that were to become the Sefirot and other primordial effects. In order for a creation to be possible there must first be a contraction, a concentration of all energies at a center. Then, an expansion occurs; the gathered energies are sent forth in concentrated form. This emanation from the divine world into the hidden world became the ten numbers and twenty-two letters: the Sefirot and language of creation.

As far as Aikido is concerned, kotodama theory, according to Stevens (1987 p. 105), sees the universe as having originated from an incomprehensibly dense point, represented by the ultraconcentrated vibration, *su*. Eons ago, steam, smoke, and mist emanated from that point, enveloping it in a nebulous sphere. From *su*, the primordial kotodama point, the sound of cosmic inhalation, energy-sound-breath, simultaneously spiraled forth. *Su* extended circularly into the sounds *u-u-u-yu-mu* and also expanded vertically into the sounds *a-o-u-e-i*. The tension between these sounds gave birth to spirit-matter, fire-water, yin-yang, and further evolved into the seventy-five kotodama that maintain existence (Stevens, 1987, p. 102).

The Symbolic Nature and Structure of Reality

Kotodama and Kabbalah are strange symbolic languages. At their heart lies algorithms. Today algorithms, systems of symbols that can be used logically to answer any question, are found in medicine, in computers, and in toasters and refrigerators and other systems. In kotodama and Kabbalah, algorithms may be used to guide the curious, the dreamer, the adventurous, to help those who have lost their way in a restless world. The two algorithms are distinct but overlap to some degree. In kotodama theory there are four spirit realms involving the building blocks of a perfect world (Stevens, 1987 pp. 102-105). In addition, Morihei referred to “three elements” (harmonization, and a triangle; inhalation, and a circle; exhalation, and a square), and “eight powers” (movement, calm, solidification, release, extension, retraction, unification, division). But the connections,

between and among these concepts and both *ki* and *kokyu*, powers used in “downing an opponent,” with Aikido as “the path of spiritual integration and love” (Stevens, 1987, p. 109) is not available to us, although they appear to relate to matters that are tied to the practice of Aikido techniques. How these matters relate to the kami that preoccupied Morihei are also not clear. We are left with a number of interesting but disparate elements of a mystical and esoteric nature that seem important to Aikido.

Kabbalah can help us here. There appears to be some correspondence to the four universes or realms of reality of Kabbalah, which are in turn connected to triads, sets of three Sefirot, and the Foundation, that together are the basis of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life; described and elaborated upon, the Tree reflects both the inner life of the deity and the sacred psychology of human beings. Incorporating the Sefirot Tree into Aikido practice makes it possible to transform emotions, shift motivations, clear awareness, calm the mind, and develop spiritually. This can be accomplished against a very large backdrop of knowledge of Kabbalah that has been written and in many cases translated into the English language and is readily available to all, whereas the esoteric bases of Aikido are much less accessible. In a subsequent section a more specific relationship of the Sefirot to Aikido practice will be presented.

The Tree of Life is a symbolical icon, a representation of the ten Sefirot. Sefirot have been compared to complex databases, or DNA (i.e., God’s DNA), or even God’s soul (Feldman, 1999, Wolf, 1999). In Kabbalah, the Sefirot represent, and provide data about, aspects of transcendence or God consciousness that can be used in the quest for the self. At the same time, the Sefirot should be understood as complexes of symbolic focal points and manifestations of heart and brain, of energy or in Aikido terms, *ki*, but each with a different “identity” (the *ki* of anger, the *ki* of love) as part of a larger spirit or *ki*. The paths that connect the energies are important in their own right; each of the 22 paths are different forms of consciousness or will. God leaves no footprints in the material world, but It has some kind of presence here. Much more important is the idea that, if God has a presence, this means that God can be experienced, and can be known; Morihei is said to have experienced the Ultimate One. The Tree of Life is a threshold of thresholds between our material existence and that part of God that is knowable; this is where God touches the material world at least through the mind of human beings. The Tree of Life is where God and men and women meet on common ground, uniting the sacred with the profane. The Tree at the same time may become the basis of Aikido rituals and provide meaning and context for the practices, replacing the knowledge that Morihei took with him when he died.

But there is more to this than we might suspect.

Behind this iconic and cryptic algorithm is a structure of mystical psychology. The secrets of the divine realms are presented to us not as mumbo-jumbo but as a way into our own inner self and the higher reality. According to Stevens, prior to training, Morihei sat quietly to bring his *ki* and *kokyu* in tune with energy patterns of the universe (Stevens, 1987 p. 113). Kabbalists may practice ascent of the soul using a number of techniques including reciting divine names, combining and pronouncing the letters, meditating, and assuming special bodily postures, including putting the head between the knees (Idel, 1988, pp. 88-96), somewhat similar, perhaps, to a technique known in Aikido as *ukemi*. Sefirot are distinct stages in the journey from utter hidden oneness toward self-revelation; we may also see them as the accessible reality within Aikido. As we use the Sefirot to move within and above ourselves, reaching for the transpersonal, the vague, confounding, and seemingly formlessness of our inner-most self becomes manifest, takes form, shape, and features that we scarcely knew were within us become apparent. This is our quest and our goal. And we become able to penetrate the divine that had been beyond comprehension or belief. This is very real and very possible! The Tree also represents, or is also a simile for man and woman. To Kabbalists, seeing the Tree in at least two ways makes sense because human beings are created in God’s image. The power of the Sefirot, the paradigm of divine life, also exists, and is active in human beings. Furthermore, the world of the Sefirot, the world of God the Creator, is capable of being visualized in terms of the image of a human being. In addition, the Sefirot show a relationship to some important Kotodama principles. These notions are presented in a diagram that combines Kotodama notions with Kabbalistic ones.

The Sefirot represent aspects of the divine, but also more than that. They are not independent; rather, they each contribute to the functioning of the Sefirot system and to systems that make up the larger system. Bear in mind that the structure and nature of each Sefirah is important. But equally important is the place of each Sefirah in the system; the 22 paths or letters connecting the Sefirot are also of critical importance in understanding and making the journey. According to Kabbalah theory, the four separate but interconnected universes or realms that exist are each based on a cosmic quality. These qualities are produced by and found within the sacred name of the Ein-Sof. Ein-Sof is the name given to the innermost God, the hidden Being of Divinity who has no qualities or attributes and is referred to as the “Infinite” or “Without End.” Each of the four realms or subsystems of existence corresponds to one of the specific attributes of the divine name. In kotodama theory, the one point, *su*, gives rise through the vibratory influence of sound, to four spirit levels, which are the source of funda-

mental qualities of the universe and at the same time give rise to other qualities. The spirit levels and the four univers-

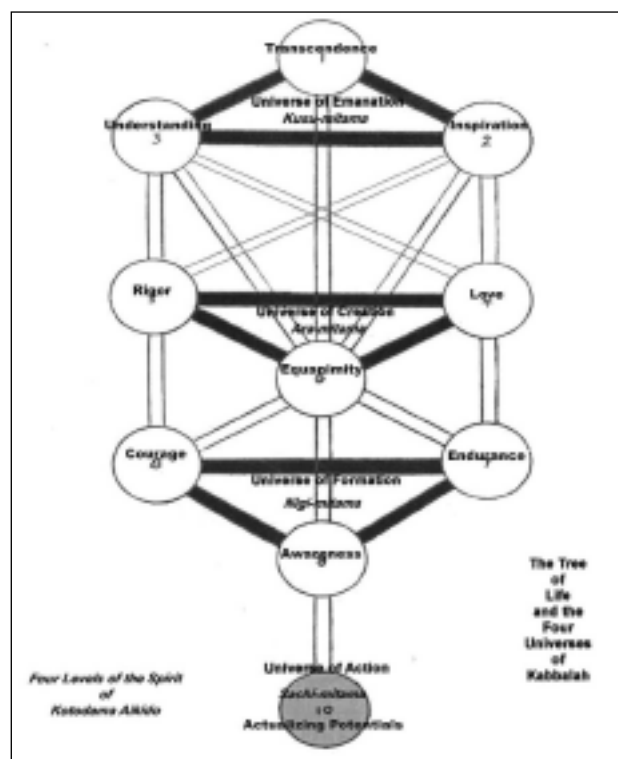


Figure 1. The Sefirot-Spirit Levels-Universes.

es have much in common both phenomenally and intrinsically, though they also differ in some respects.

Universe of Emanation and Spirit Level of Kusu-mitama

The highest domain of existence is called “Emanation” in Kabbalah. It encompasses the pure dimension of the names, essences, or “forces” of the divine. Each of the ten “names” of God, which give rise to the Sefirot, is viewed as referring to a different emanation or quality of the transcendent. Emanation refers to the idea of primal force. Since force is defined as the ability to do something, this highest universe, which is itself the Godhead (Steinsaltz, 1980), holds the forces implicit in all the rest. It also relates to our deepest inner Source, which is revealed to us only if we strive to learn its nature by way of the *via mystica*. The universe of Emanation corresponds to Kusu-mitama, the highest spirit level of kotodama. Kusu-mitama encompasses the qualities of heaven, wisdom, light, and principle. Here the coordination of mind, body, and spirit, an ultimate goal of Aikido practice, is found.

The three highest Sefirot form a triad in this domain of the Tree of Life that is itself a collaboration of Transcendence, Inspiration, and Understanding. Transcendence is the supreme crown of God, a circle of endless energies and hidden light received as the influx from the

Ein-Sof. Inspiration is the primordial idea of God and emerges from Transcendence. Inspiration refers to the primal point of existence, the creative spark that began the flow of Aiki and of all flashes of inspiration. Understanding gives birth to the intelligence of God and human beings, emerges from the radiance of Inspiration, absorbs the spark, taking it into its womb, incubating, and giving birth to the lower Sefirot, and shaping Aikido. This triad is associated with the element of fire.

Thus Aiki emerges from the Sefirot of Inspiration and the manifest or concretization of Aikido begins to emerge from the Sefirot of Understanding. The hidden and divine attributes move toward embodiment in the spectrum of energies of the lower seven Sefirot that are the seeds of the range of affective connections to the instincts of the human soul and the divinity. These are among the hidden talents that the practice of Aikido will cause to flower. Morihei put it this way (Ueshiba, 1992):

Your heart is full of fertile seeds, waiting to sprout.
Just as a lotus flower springs from the mire to
bloom splendidly, the interaction of the cosmic
breath causes the flower of the spirit to bloom and
bear fruit in this world. (p. 30)

The Sefirot make more accessible the fundamental emotional components and principles of Aikido practice. The interplay and interaction of the inner directions or principles also compose and are manifest in each human being. Thus Kabbalah explains the origins and gives shape and larger meaning to the emerging structure and building blocks of Aikido. Aikido practice, on the other hand, transforms as it embodies the fundamental and universal truths of Kabbalah. Furthermore, Aikido practice is a way of negotiating between the mysticism of Kabbalah and the highly refined and concrete principles of Aikido, such as centeredness, equanimity, and connection. As we develop in practice our passions become more multifaceted; as self-knowledge increases our emotions become more complex.

Universe of Creation and Spirit Level of Ara-mitama

“Creation” is the second dimension or universe of Kabbalah and points to the attribute of pattern. In this realm of creation the evanescent archetypes of the first realm are organized into a coherent order. Corresponding to the human, this universe incorporates our personality and its structure of ideas, concepts, and viewpoints (Steinsaltz, 1980). The universe of Creation corresponds to the kotodama spirit level of Ara-mitama, in which the qualities of fire, valor, progress, and completion are found. Morihei may have been referring to this as the divine realm.

The Tree of Life triad in this universe is made up of the Sefirot of Love, Rigor, and Equanimity. Love, the mercy of

God, is free-flowing energy from the soul and extends to all of God's creatures. But too much love smothers and stunts growth. Rigor, a symbolic cluster that includes power, punishment, and destruction, serves to constrain, measure, and limit love. But unrestrained power can be cruel and destructive, and in this form it is also known as stern judgment and punishment. The dialectic between love and rigor finds resolution in Equanimity or compassion, the third Sefirah in this triad. It is the heart and sun of the Tree of Life and mediates between Love and Rigor, in other words, it is the center of the Tree and represents each person's center, as well. This Sefirah incorporates self-restraint and strength of character. It controls anger and, as well, controls the flow of love according to the needs, abilities, and deserts of those who are to receive it. Balance, equanimity, and symmetry are Aikido principles that are critical elements of this centering. By restoring to Aikido practice the category of the sacred, we can reinforce an ethic of care commensurate, and able to cope, with the great power and abilities Aikido helps to develop. This triad is associated with the element of air. The nature of ki is located in this triad (Ueshiba, 1991, pp. 33-34). Ki has no clear analogue or definition in the Western world. Morihei often talked about personal ki and universal ki, but there are hundreds of Japanese expressions that incorporate the character for ki (Kaku, 2000, pp. 2-3). The Kabbalistic notion of "soul" is roughly equivalent to what Morihei was discussing with regard to personal ki in Aikido. Kabbalists generally recognize at least three levels of the soul in human beings: animal soul, divine soul, and higher soul (Steinsaltz, 1980). Universal ki is somewhat different, equivalent perhaps to "the breath of God." In Aikido we practice connecting and controlling our ki; it can be concentrated and focused in a tight narrow way, like the energy of rigor or power, as when it fills the *tachi* (sword), or *taijutsu* (empty hand), in a strike *shomen* (overhead strike). Direction is given to the Sefirah of Rigor by the mind represented by the Sefirah of Understanding or wisdom. Ki may also take an expansive form, spreading out, reaching gently and outwardly, like Love; in this form our awareness is 360 degrees. Balance between these aspects of ki is achieved through the interaction of the Sefirah of Equanimity and the Sefirah of Awareness as we deal with our enemies, strangers, other people, nature, and ourselves.

Universe of Formation and Spirit Level of Nigi-mitama

The third universe is "Formation." This world, the world of feeling and emotion, encompasses the qualities of activity or energy. Here the potentialities that were grown in the other two universes are activated. This realm also reaches to the biological aspect of the human body and its many life functions such as metabolism, digestion, and so forth. This is also the spirit level of Nigi-mitama. This realm

expresses the qualities of water, fidelity, harmony, and propriety.

The Sefirot of Endurance, Courage, and Awareness make up the third triad of the Tree of Life. Endurance refers to the eternal existence of God and as well to our persistence. Courage refers to the splendor and majesty of God and also to facing our fears as we live and grow. Awareness (also known as Righteousness) is the foundation of all active forces in God and stimulates and is stimulated by righteous acts and brings about the cosmic coupling of Awareness and Actualizing Potentials, the bottom most Sefirah. This is a form of blending, a deep principle of Aikido practice. The coupling increases the flow of positive energy into our physical world. This universe is associated with the element of water. It may have been what Morihei referred to as the hidden realm; the stage at which blending and breath power are brought under control and their meanings grounded in action.

Universe of Action and Spirit Level of Sachi-mitama

Finally there is the Kabbalist universe of "Action," both physical and spiritual, the domain of substance and matter in all of its myriad expressions, from molecules to stars. This universe is considered the lowest and most dense of the four; it includes both the corporal pains and sensual delights that we experience in everyday life. It is the domain of concrete behavior, where actual deeds are of chief importance as a way to the sacred. The kotodama level of Sachi-mitama is equivalent here, adding its qualities of earth, love, compassion, and cherishing. This may be Morihei's realm of the manifest. At this level we can understand that the dojo receives the intelligence of Aikido rituals, gestated in the womb of Understanding, and that we perform in practice. Submitting to the norms of Aikido, facing up to danger, taking care of the attacker (Saotome, 1993), obeying the teacher, controlling one's impulses, become obvious as we realize our potentials and begin to actualize them as we pursue our Aikido practice.

The Sefirah of Actualizing Potentials (also known as Presence), at the base of the Tree of Life, is found in the Universe of Action and the level of Sachi-mitama. Actualizing Potentials refers to the seeds from which roots contact the earth, and the shoot that, branching, reaches upward to the transpersonal. The branches contact the Sefirot of Imagination, Understanding, and Transcendence, as self-knowledge increases, and the cycle of growth leads to more complexities of mind and body. It is also symbolic of the community of people who practice Aikido. It reflects the cosmic *yoni*, the Hindu universal female principle that rules the physical world.

It is not possible to fully explicate all the manifest, hidden, and divine characteristics of this complex, detailed, yet

entirely cryptic and vague picture. We must practice Sefirot Aikido with conscious, focused, deeply attentive awareness, to learn more. Subsequently, we shall discuss the Sefirot Tree and relate it to some specific and detailed issues and rituals in the practice of Aikido.

Thresholds, Sefirot, Ki, and the Ever-evolving Person

In Kabbalah theory, every form in our universe has previously passed through the other three. A human being must first have existed as a transcendent image, then a specific pattern, and lastly been infused with focused energy before assuming his or her physical shape. This brings some clarity to the cryptic remark found in some Kabbalistic writings, “we are the cosmos.” Morihei also has told his students that “One’s body is a miniature universe” (Stevens, 1987, p. 105).

The formal, prescribed behaviors or techniques of Aikido are one side of the dual nature of ritual. Ritual has another side; the symbolic, contextual meanings that are linked to the formalities. The collaboration of Aikido and Kabbalah is a marriage of form and content. Each universe or spirit level is its own realm so there is a threshold between each of the levels. These thresholds are at the same time barriers and gates, branches of the tree, points of change, energy, and transformation. We raise the holy sparks (think ki) of our soul to each successive level to eventually achieve the transpersonal and a mystical experience of adherence to, or knowledge of, God. The ascent towards God by means of the Sefirot follows the Tree of Life. Morihei taught that practice of Aikido was a way to attain transcendence. Ascent can be done in a variety of ways and means that unify the ancient rituals and symbols of Aikido with the ancient symbols, meanings, ideas, and information, of Kabbalah. Alternatively, we can climb down the tree, using the Sefirot as a map of mystical psychology. Each individual person is a miniature Tree of Life and each of us represents a physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual shape based upon the manner in which we harmonize our inner Sefirot. This shape we bring to the dojo when we start Aikido practice has grown for the most part without conscious awareness. But the patterns that make it up can be brought under conscious control. Emotions are an integral part of the creation of our primal self and a key to transformations. Combining spiritual depth with technical prowess in Aikido is the key; we leave one threshold and approach another. The collaboration serves to augment our understanding.

The dynamic world of the Sefirot system and subsystems is the world of the Godhead. In Kabbalah, the former contains the infinite unity of divine being, not only in its hidden essence but also in its creative unfolding. The Kabbalists are interested in showing how the world of the Sefirot is related to the world outside of God. All beings in the lower realm of nature, as well as in the upper worlds of

the angels and pure forms, of the “Throne” of God, have in them something which connects them with one of the creative aspects of divinity, or, in other words, with the Sefirot system; “What is below is above and what is inside is outside.” Morihei spoke of the Creator of the Universe as being “a sacred flame within one’s body” (Stevens, 1987, p. 113). In the Kabbalistic view everything not only is in everything else but also acts upon everything else, whether we are aware of these things or not. A person’s ascent to higher worlds and to the borders of nothingness involves no motion on his or her part, for “where you stand, there stand all the worlds.” Morihei in a doka said; “Cast off limiting thoughts and return to true emptiness. Stand in the midst of the Great Void. This is the secret of the Way of a Warrior” (Ueshiba, 1992, p. 110). Aikido is created and recreated by students and teachers in the dojo, but is also independent of us. It reflects our will but also affects our will; practitioners are free but our actions fall into familiar patterns. Aikido with Kabbalah is a brainwide and somatic process that is simultaneously individual and communal. The quest is found in the meaning of ideas, symbols, and rituals.

Aikido Ritual Performances and the Tree of Life

One way of seeing the reciprocal connections between Kabbalah and Aikido builds on our psychological perceptions. There is a self-image, a body-image, and a dojo-image. What is learned in the dojo can be taken back into the community; the community-image can be elaborated to include Aikido if and when there is an overlap in the minds of students between these images. A connection based on technical, martial prowess is inadequate to build a complex, multifaceted mental image. Sefirot Aikido broadens the connection between the dojo-image, the self-image, and the community by linking moral and physical with community processes. Using the language of the Sefirot, with the behavioral skills of Aikido rituals, generates a cohesive whole and sustains it as well; the richness of ritual techniques that are imitated, balanced by a rich moral-linguistic context.

Our attitude toward rituals should be governed by certain basic assumptions concerning the functions they serve. In the flow of performative rituals, they are presumed to accomplish the following:

- a. harmony and unification of mind, body, and spirit;
- b. conjunction of personal ki and universal ki;
- c. setting things right, repair of the self, community, world, universe; and
- d. defending against, and mastery over, impulses and desires to harm others.

These assumptions emphasize elements of the Sefirot, sometimes singly and often in combination. The Sefirot of Rigor and Love, locked in dialectical interaction and each, con-

nected to the other, carries within it the potential to become the other. This tension is resolved by the moderating influence of the Sefirah of Equanimity. The dialectic of dominance and submission in Aikido is resolved by interrupting the interaction, neutralizing it, and transforming it. The interaction is not transformed into a reversal of dominance and submission, though that potential exists. The desired outcome in Aikido is to help the attacker overcome his or her evil intentions and inclinations and by example thereby transform the interactions and, as well, both the attacker and the defender. By restoring to Aikido practice the category of the sacred, we can reinforce an ethic of care. Kabbalah may focus on Aikido's sacred center but also call for more explicit instruction along with martial practice.

Elements of all rituals involve rhythm and repetition. There are differences, however, between and among the rituals at each level or realm of existence that relate to the quest. That is, there are differences in frame of mind and language and terminology used to explain or describe the nature and meaning of the rituals. Rituals are transformed from merely a physical activity by a specialized, trained, mystical intention or mindfulness, *kavvanah*, which accompanies the activities. In this fashion, an outward action is transformed into a mystical movement of the human will (Scholem, 1969, p. 126; 1961, p. 34). Similarly, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, son of the founder, discussed the cultivation of *nen* as taught by Morihei. It is the essence of Aikido, a mental concentration of the spirit and the body as we seek union with the universal reality. These intentions gave focus to his meditations and his practice. Mindfulness, *nen-kavvanah*, transforms ritualistic combat techniques of Aikido into the means "to become one with the universe" (Ueshiba, 1984, pp. 34-39). In this fashion, we move into new realms and are choosing our path and evolution. It is through these ritual practices and the emotions they arouse that the Aikido student may be transformed. It has been pointed out, for example, that the Aikido technique or form, known as *ikkyo*, manifests the characteristic of connectedness, "and one's sincere practice of *ikkyo* in its many variations both reflects and is reflected in one's sense of connectedness in daily life" (Leonard, 1987, p. 13). As a practical matter, the teacher, as well as advanced students, foster an understanding of dojo mores. We should go further and foster an understanding of the context of Aikido.

There is a tendency for students of Aikido to take for granted the complex and peculiar historical conditions that permitted them to practice Aikido. It is a form of "collective amnesia" forgetting who we are, how we came to be, and therefore of what we must do to continue to grow. This taking-for-granted threatens to undermine and eventually destroy Aikido. The practice of Aikido can itself be transformed as the sacred returns to our field of activity; Aikido

is a gift from the East that continually gives and does not merely take. What Kabbalah and Morihei's Aikido have in common, as mentioned earlier, is not a program for correcting weakness so much as one for growth, resiliency, transformation, and competency, if nothing else. Sefirot Aikido relies upon, fosters, and strengthens human characteristics such as courage, future mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skills, faith, work ethic, perseverance, and the capacity for transcendence, to name a few virtues (e.g., see Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Aikido practice needs to be more aware of and deliberately help us train and develop the emotional states of mind that often unconsciously influence rationality and behavior on and off the mat. Kabbalah, once more, can provide a more accessible framework for this work.

I have argued that spirituality is essential to the practice as well as the understanding of Aikido and that, through dialogue and in other ways, it can and should be incorporated into both our practice and our awareness when we come to the dojo. The practice hall should be a place for spiritual development as well as development and display of technical virtuosity. But while skills and proficiency are advancing, Aikido today seems to have lost some of its most positive attribute, its ability to touch people's lives, to teach and incorporate such matters as compassion and empathy (Nussbaum, 2003). Students often come to the dojo in a very vulnerable period in their lives. They want, need, and should get practice partners and teachers who teach more than techniques without context. We need to do more and this paper suggests a way of approaching the deeper teachings within Aikido using Kabbalah. This is congruent with what the founder seems to have envisioned for Aikido and how he seemed to try to teach it.

To come to practice in the dojo, we must find and pass through a threshold. As we step onto the mat, "we are like a performer, ready to step out of the wings into the light of knowingness, self, and transpersonal." We are welcomed into the kingdom of Aikido, governed by the spirit of Sefirot Aikido that differs from most other martial arts. We have approached the bottom-most Sefirah, "Realizing Potentials," also known as "Seeds" and "Into the World," that already contains the potential for transcendence. It is at this time that we will begin to learn and practice the rituals and symbolisms of Aikido and should also begin or continue to develop ourselves emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually in the context of Sefirot Aikido.

Changing old patterns of behavior is not easy and requires work, as does building a lasting relationship between Kabbalah and Aikido. But we can learn new patterns and unlearn old patterns of behaving, communicating, and understanding. As we learn more about ourselves, we can become more aware of ourselves and control ourselves

better. This process enables us to understand others, anticipate their actions, and control them in better ways. We also learn better ways to relate to people at various levels. This process takes place in the dojo but also requires some effort and practice even when we leave the dojo. While practicing, it is critically important to learn to intensely concentrate with seriousness, *nen-kavvanah*, on what we are doing, such as on our connection to uke and to the entire company who are on the mat and in the dojo.

To aid this process of practice can be the function of the Sefirot Tree and universes of Kotadama. The Sefirot identify some of the important mental and emotional principles that are the focus of our progress in Aikido that parallels our spiritual progress. Just as a list of test requirements is incomplete, so is the Sefirot Tree: both need discussion and demonstration.

For example, we are told that we should practice Aikido in a joyful manner and smile when we are thrown down and are taking ukemi. This advice has a physiological, emotional, and spiritual component. Physiologically, smiling while falling down will turn a situation that in our earlier experiences may have been painful and something to be avoided into a normative experience that is neither painful nor undesirable. From the perspective of Kabbalah, a joyful mood while praying is necessary because we are serving God in a joyous manner; this is a spiritual ideal. "A person ought to derive greater pleasure from the joy of serving God ... than from all the money in the world" (Fine, 2003, p. 75). Here again we find Aikido embodies not just an important Kabbalistic principle, but also its emotional and physical aspects, helping in another way to build a lasting connection among them.

The functions of many of the ritual techniques in Aikido, as in Kabbalah, exist in many realms. They share meanings with rituals in general, that is, they convey intentions, show respect, communicate, reduce aggressiveness, maintain a stable social order. But they also have more specific meanings within the context of Aikido. According to Stevens (1987, p. 87), four techniques remained at the core of Aikido despite the ever-changing nature of the art. The basic four are *irimi*, *tenkan*, *shiho-nage*, and *ikkyo*. Our interpretation of the techniques will change as we look at them from the perspective of various Sefirah, such as Endurance or Love, as well as with experience and time, and our growth and understanding as an individual will also manifest itself through the techniques (Saotome, 1993). This also can be said of the hero's journey as we approach the uppermost Sefirah. Here again Kabbalah and Aikido shine light on each other and strengthen their connections.

We are now able to better appreciate Sefirot Aikido, the existence foretold in the depiction of the Tree of Life and Universes of both Kabbalah and Aikido. The Sefirot repre-

sent characteristics of the deity but at the same time are ethical values and emotional expressions of human beings. They are some of the expectations for behavior that are practiced within the context of the dojo and have meaning in our lives as we move about the world and in the community. Emotions are performed in the sense that they are a function of the ways in which we are taught and expected to behave in relationship to others as we practice and interact with them and others, outside the dojo, as well as inside. As such, they should be a matter of discussion, always evolving and being acted out in dynamic, interactive ways on the mat. In this light, the Sefirot, much like Aikido techniques, are presented as nodes or constellations of values and not fixed in stone. They are symbolic clusters linked by association. As we move up from the Universe of Action, *Sachimitama*, the shades of meaning of the Sefirot change, as do the techniques. Sefirot are like prisms that contain all light and colors and reveal them as we turn, roll, grow, on our journey from the hidden self toward self-revelation (Green, 2004).

Aikido is physically demanding, it "is capable of bringing up hidden emotions of all kinds ... but also forces ... [us] constantly to look for the meaning of ... [our] experience..." (Heiny, 1993, p. 15). When we are physically threatened or attacked on the mat or off, it may bring up competitiveness, anger, fear, jealousy, hatred, and other negative feelings. Rituals for awareness and equanimity, learned and practiced in the dojo, plant the seeds for successful passage in martial and spiritual terms. They connect us with ourselves, teach us emotional control, and teach us how to connect and beneficially control others. Martial techniques require that we learn these methods, develop our awareness, then learn to respond to the opponent intent on attacking, even before *uke* strikes. The ability to anticipate attacks requires training. Equanimity while threatened or under attack, begins here (e.g., controlling mental and physical states involving breath and reflex control, among other behaviors and feelings).

Embedding Sefirot into Aikido Practice

What tools do we need to have in order to bring about changes available to us in Sefirot Aikido? Mitsugi Saotome (1993, p. 204) mentions that, when he teaches an Aikido class, he "will emphasize a particular movement or feeling, or a different way of seeing a technique." The ritualized movements are richly symbolic and reveal their inner nature "as light passing through a prism." The Sefirot and Aikido techniques have this in common; each is composed of layer upon layer of meaning. The outermost layers are most accessible to the student and perhaps comprise the self-defense expression of Sefirot Aikido. Even when practicing a well-known *irimi*, this does not mean that we should have noth-

ing in mind. On the contrary, the practice is to be accompanied by *nen-kavvanah*. The basis of the *nen-kavvanah* is the various symbolic meanings of a particular Sefirah and its relationship to the technique we are constructing on the mat at that time. The class may be instructed that during this practice the Irimi is paired with the Sefirah of Rigor, which represents a cluster of symbols that we imagine also includes punishment, sternness, or destruction. A rigorous irimi is different from a courageous irimi in terms of mind-set and physicality; and we become aware of how we feel and enter differently.

Sefirot Aikido can help enrich Aikido practice and personal life, since competencies in Aikido are more than technical skill. Some specific areas in which the two can be incorporated into regular practice involve ikkyo, tenkan, breathing, and ukemi exercises. One tool for this that can be used in the dojo is to place near the mats 5x8 flashcards (sometimes a single card, sometimes more than one) on which a Sefirah name or various names are written, where they can be seen during practice sessions. Still another method of embedding Kabbalah in Aikido practice involves what are referred to as warm-up exercises done without a partner, for example *irimi-tenkan* and ikkyo movements. The former is a practice in entering and turning that can be done while vocalizing the Sefirot names in the right branch and left branch of the Tree: Endurance, Courage, Love, Rigor, Imagination, Understanding. The ikkyo practice is a somewhat vertical movement, hands close together and moving straight up in front of the face, coming off of the back foot. Instead of counting as the movement is often done, the names of the Sefirot in the tree trunk can be repeated: Potentials, Awareness, Equanimity, Transcendence. In this way the richness of ritual movements that are being practiced are embodied and balanced by a rich moral context. Over time, the Sefirot may interact with techniques, rituals, and worlds and universes in diverse and creative ways. This is how we can move eventually from the outermost to the innermost meanings. Overall, Sefirot Aikido contains and employs physical, mental, and emotional elements that reveal new aspects and stages in the journey from utter hidden oneness to self-revelation.

The same technique does not need to be practiced over and over, since each application is only one narrow reflection of an infinite process and the Sefirot Tree is best seen as a useful guide. It is an elaboration of the earlier Tree with Aikido techniques and Sefirot added at appropriate levels. The ritual practice techniques are the ones Morihei apparently felt were basic to Aikido, whereas using the Sefirot at each level may lead progressively up the Tree to the transpersonal. Some techniques may take many years to reach Understanding and perhaps more to ultimately master.

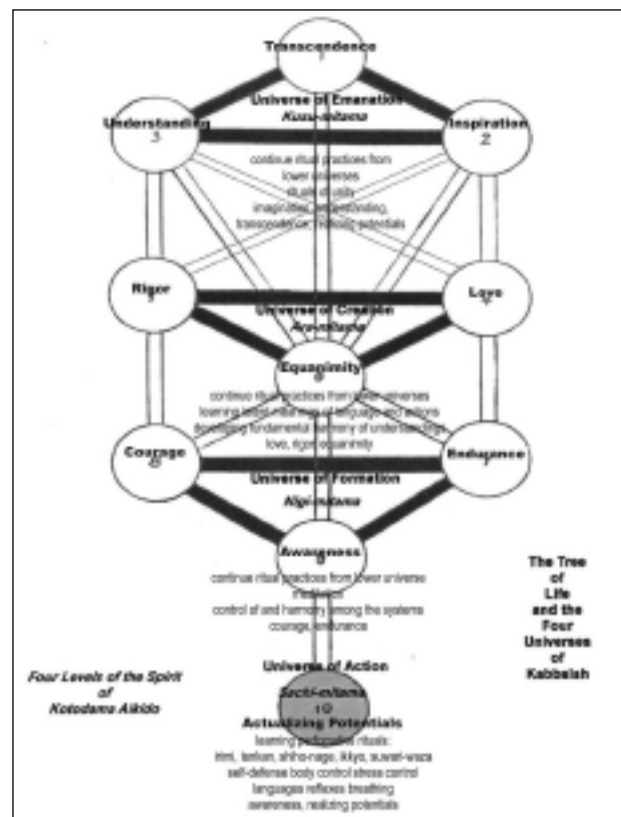


Figure 2. Ritual Practice in Aikido.

Figure 2 may be described as well in this fashion:

Universe of Emanation-continuing ritual practices from lower universes; rituals of unity and coordination of mind, body, and spirit; focus on Imagination, Understanding, Transcendence, Realizing Potentials

Universe of Creation- continuing ritual practices from lower universes; learning latent meanings of language and actions; developing fundamental harmony of understandings; focus on Love, Rigor, Equanimity

Universe of Formation-continuing ritual practices from lower universe, irimi, and so forth; meditation; rituals for control of kokyū, harmony, and blending among, the limbic, cognitive, and neuromuscular systems; focus on Courage, Endurance

Universe of Action- learn performative rituals: irimi, tenkan, shiho-nage, ikkyo, *suwari-waza*; body control; stress inoculation; language; reflexes; breathing; focus on Awareness, Realizing Potentials, Transcendence.

Conclusion

The spiritual dimensions of life are among the most important cultural factors structuring human experience, beliefs, values, and behavior. Yet this dimension of life has been largely ignored in much of contemporary Aikido. Just as the psychiatric profession has moved to reintroduce spirituality into its practice (Lukoff, Lu, Turner, 1995), so

should Aikido—and its insularity from matters of such great importance to the individual and the group should end. Sefirot Aikido, combining Aikido with Kabbalah, offers an avenue for mutually, agreeably, and profitably supporting each tradition to the benefit of both. As Morihei said: “To fully implement...[Aikido] you must be able to sport freely in the manifest, hidden, and divine realms” (Ueshiba, 1992, p. 111). In sum, there are a number of ways in which Aikido can contribute to Kabbalah, as follows:

1. Aikido may be seen as the return to the Western world of a gift (e.g., Genesis [25:6] relates that Abraham gave gifts to his sons by his concubines and sent them away “eastward, to the east country”); from this Biblical perspective, Aikido may have been one of these gifts;
2. Aikido practice expresses many of the fundamental and universal truths of Kabbalah and can be a way of negotiating between the mysticism of Kabbalah and the highly refined and concrete principles of Aikido, such as centeredness, connection, leading, and extension;
3. While Kabbalah has an orientation toward the transcendent, it may be useful to also focus this on self-defense needs, especially in the urban environment that exists in most Western and Western-style countries;
4. Aikido provides a way to both embody and ground Kabbalah in the physical world, as a threshold through which meaning that transcends us may enter our lives; Aikido challenges us and reveals ancient skills that we may not have known existed such that, through Aikido dojo practice, Kabbalah can fulfill its aim to be active in the world at both the individual and community levels and not just speculative and theoretical;
5. Aikido can be culturally neutral, which is positive in the sense that it allows many people to interact with others with whom they may have nothing in common, but is negative in the sense that many aspects of society which could be shared are ignored, whereas Kabbalah can help Aikido overcome this deficiency;
6. Aikido can give Kabbalah a place to practice (e.g., in the dojo);
7. Aikido skills support positive feeling that enable the development of positive traits symbolized in Kabbalah;
8. Aikido practice is a way of negotiating between the mysticism of Kabbalah and the highly refined and concrete principles of Aikido, such as centeredness, equanimity, and connection; and
9. Aikido practice expresses, as it also embodies, the fundamental and universal truths of Kabbalah.

Similarly, Kabbalah can contribute to Aikido, as follows:

1. Kabbalah can remind Aikido that the heart of mysticism contains a certain category of experiences that are beyond rational thought or ordinary sense perception,

such as how Aikido principles can be located within the Kabbalistic Tree of Life;

2. Kabbalah can enrich Aikido practice as a way of finding the sacred in the mundane;
3. Kabbalah can help Aikido enact such virtues as prudence, temperance, and courage and help define what kind of moral life we should lead (Atherton, 2001);
4. Kabbalah can help Aikido relocate our intimate connection with the divine, our unbounded awareness, to regain cosmic consciousness, without renouncing ourselves or the world (Matt, 2002);
5. Kabbalah can facilitate Aikido’s understanding of how the intelligence of God emerges from the radiance of Imagination and gives birth to the lower Sefirot as well as training rituals, and, from this, can show, in the dojo, how the wisdom that created Aikido can be transformed and made practical yet, though constantly changing, remain true to Ueshiba’s vision;
6. Kabbalah can provide a framework for Aikido to understand how the creative spark of Aiki emerged from the Inspiration Sefirah and the manifest or concretization of Aiki begins to emerge from the incubator of the Sefirah of Understanding as the hidden and divine attributes move toward emergence in the spectrum of energies of the lower seven Sefirot and rituals;
7. Kabbalah can restore to Aikido practice the category of the sacred and reinforce an ethic of care able to cope with the great power and abilities Aikido helps us develop;
8. Kabbalah can move the Aikido dojo from a martial arts practice hall to a moral community of martial artists;
9. Kabbalah’s symbolism can command the respect of Aikido students by incorporating aspirations for transcendence;
10. Kabbalah with Aikido can feed people’s hunger for ritual and cultural tradition;
11. Kabbalah can help Aikido practitioners overcome their collective amnesia and bring back into consciousness the history and context of practice, as well as the direction of future growth and development of Aikido, for those who practice Aikido; and
12. Kabbalah can explain the origins and gives shape and larger meaning to the emerging structure and building blocks of Aikido that, in turn, can make more accessible the fundamental emotional components or principles of ki and Aikido practice.

In conclusion, Sefirot Aikido, can be highly beneficial for both traditions. Moreover, this type of syncretism illustrates the value of modern transpersonal approaches to build upon different traditions in synergistic ways, leading to new forms that may be crucial for human adaptation.

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